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Security Council

Fifty-second Year

Provisional

3797th Meeting

Friday, 11 July 1997, 11.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Osvald	(Sweden)
Members:	Chile	Mr. Larraín
	China	Mr. Qin Huasun
	Costa Rica	Mr. Berrocal Soto
	Egypt	Mr. Awaad
	France	Mr. Dejammet
	Guinea-Bissau	Mr. Cabral
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Kenya	Mr. Mahugu
	Poland	Mr. Matuszewski
	Portugal	Mr. Soares
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Choi
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Gomersall
	United States of America	Mr. Gnehm

Agenda

The situation in Sierra Leone

97-85816 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 12.30 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Sierra Leone

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In accordance with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The President: On behalf of the Council, I welcome the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Ghana.

At the invitation of the President, Chief Ikimi (Nigeria) and Mr. Jonah (Sierra Leone) took seats at the Council table; Mr. Essy (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Camara (Guinea), Mr. Gbeho (Ghana) and Mr. Mapuranga (Zimbabwe), took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 10 July 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that you invite the Permanent Observer for the Organization of African Unity to the United Nations at the formal meeting of the Security Council on 11 July 1997 to make a statement on the item 'The situation in Sierra Leone' under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure."

That letter will be published as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/1997/536.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 to Mr. Sy.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in response to the request contained in a letter dated 9 July 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, document S/1997/531.

I should like to draw attention to document S/1997/499, which contains the text of the letter dated 27 June 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, transmitting the text of the final communiqué issued at the end of the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the situation in Sierra Leone, which was held at Conakry, Guinea, on 26 June 1997.

The first speaker inscribed on my list is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, on whom I now call.

Chief Ikimi (Nigeria): On behalf of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) ministerial Committee of Four, I wish to convey to you, Mr. President, our congratulations and best wishes as you carry out the functions of President during the month of July. Let me also avail myself of the opportunity to extend our courtesies to Ambassador Lavrov of the Russian Federation for his stewardship during the month of June.

The present crisis in Sierra Leone, which has been brought about by the seizure of power on 25 May 1997 by a section of the Sierra Leonean military, portends grave consequences for peace and stability in Sierra Leone and for the political process and constitutionality in governance in that country. The countries of the subregion are particularly horrified by the sheer venom of the operation, the mindless waste of human life, the disruption of civil society and the sustained destruction of infrastructure and property.

Just as we undertook an initiative in crisis management and conflict resolution in Liberia, the countries of the subregion have once again risen to the challenge of serving the cause of peace and security in the neighbouring country of Sierra Leone.

The presence here in this esteemed Council of four Foreign Ministers — from Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire

and Ghana — together with the representatives of the secretariats of ECOWAS and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) underscores the extent of the subregional concern over developments in Sierra Leone and the need for the international community to come to grips with the situation in that country and concert its efforts with those of the countries of the subregion in order to bring the crisis to a peaceful resolution.

The *coup d'état* of 25 May 1997 in Sierra Leone was tragic in nature and in consequence. Upon seizing power, the people involved in the *coup* broke into the prisons and threw open the gates, letting out all sorts of criminals and convicts. Simultaneously, the rebellious Revolutionary United Front (RUF) members were invited into Freetown. The looting of property, murder and rape became the order of the day. Freetown and its environs were vandalized. The situation became even more disturbing as national institutions, including the Central Bank of that country, were looted and burnt down. One wondered what purpose was intended by people who wished to change a Government and yet undertook to destroy vital national assets and attack their own civil population. Many have therefore felt that the conclusions were self-evident; the people involved in the *coup* never had the interests of their country at heart.

The developments in Sierra Leone, not surprisingly, give cause for our immediate concern. Sierra Leone, as members of the Council are all aware, shares vast borders with Liberia and Guinea. Liberia, for no less than seven years, has engaged the attention of our subregion as a country torn apart by inter-factional conflict. Only recently, thanks to the sustained and collective efforts of the member States of ECOWAS, life has begun to return to normalcy in that country as we implement the final phase of the peace process — namely, the conduct of elections. It is important, therefore, that the situation in Sierra Leone be carefully managed so that the progress so far achieved in Liberia is not reversed.

The Republic of Guinea is now subject to the threat of destabilization from a number of sources. As a country bordering Liberia, it has received a considerable number of refugees from that country. At present, as the situation in Sierra Leone deteriorates, Guinea has also been burdened by a new wave of Sierra Leonean refugees. These circumstances have overstretched the economy of Guinea and posed great difficulties to the political and social stability of the nation.

I might add that the effects of refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia go beyond the confines of neighbouring countries. They are felt all over the subregion, in particular, in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and the Gambia, as well as in several others where sizable numbers of refugees now exist.

For over seven years we have worked relentlessly hard to resolve the Liberian crisis. We have a responsibility to ensure that the situation in Sierra Leone, which could bring us to the path of another major engagement, as we witnessed in Liberia, is nipped in the bud.

We are encouraged so far by the universal condemnation that has attended the tragic incident in Sierra Leone. The Organization of African Unity (OAU), at its thirty-third summit in Harare, strongly condemned the *coup*, endorsed the action taken by ECOWAS to reverse the situation and called upon the international community not to accord recognition to the regime. This action by the leaders of Africa is indeed significant, as this is one issue on which the entire continent has been solid and unanimous at the highest level.

Similarly, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who was himself at the summit, added his voice to the OAU condemnation and called for the restoration of legitimate authority in that country. The position of the Secretary-General was subsequently reinforced by a presidential statement of the Security Council.

Meanwhile, since the *coup* in Sierra Leone, the Chairman of ECOWAS had undertaken consultations with his brother Heads of State in the subregion, as to how best to address the situation. Following these consultations, a one-day ministerial meeting of the ECOWAS Foreign Ministers was held in Conakry, Guinea on 26 June 1997. The sixteen member States of ECOWAS were invited to the meeting, which was also attended by the Secretary-General of the OAU, the Acting Executive Secretary of ECOWAS and the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) Force Commander.

At that meeting were taken far-reaching decisions which have since been conveyed to the Council and are now contained in Security Council document S/1997/499. The key elements of the communiqué are in three parts. The first consists of the objectives, which are the early reinstatement of the legitimate Government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the return of peace and security to

Sierra Leone and the resolution of the issues of refugees and displaced persons.

The second consists of the means of achieving these objectives. In considering the means of achieving the ECOWAS objectives in Sierra Leone, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs reaffirmed the decision made in Harare by the Heads of State and Government at the thirty-third summit meeting of the OAU on the situation in Sierra Leone and on the support of ECOWAS for the Abidjan Peace Agreement, signed on 30 November 1996. Furthermore, they stressed that no country should grant recognition to the regime that emerged following the 25 May 1997 *coup d'état*. Accordingly, they pledged to work towards the reinstatement of the legitimate Government of Sierra Leone by a combination of three measures: first, dialogue; secondly, the imposition of sanctions and embargo; and, thirdly, the use of force.

In the course of the deliberations, concern was expressed by delegations about the use of force as a means of resolving the present crisis in Sierra Leone. However, it was recognized that the other two options, including negotiations and sanctions cum blockade, could not be achieved without the use of some military force. For example, if ECOWAS were to mount a credible sanctions regime against the illegal authorities in Sierra Leone, the air, land and sea borders of Sierra Leone would have to be militarily blocked while negotiations would be enhanced by a show of force and a sustained military build-up in the area. The Foreign Ministers therefore considered that all three measures would require consultations at the highest level among ECOWAS countries. They have therefore suggested that the ECOWAS Chairman should initiate these consultations.

Due note was taken of the fact that some of our countries have civilian and ECOMOG personnel on the ground in Sierra Leone. There was concern that some of these persons could be in danger as a result of the present circumstances in Sierra Leone. The Foreign Ministers deplored the bloodletting and other human losses that occurred during the 25 May 1997 *coup d'état* and that are reported to be still happening in Sierra Leone. They therefore decided to issue a strong warning to the illegal regime in Sierra Leone against all acts of atrocities against Sierra Leonean citizens, foreign nationals living in Sierra Leone and ECOMOG personnel.

Last is the mechanism for implementing these decisions. The Foreign Ministers established a Committee to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the meeting in Conakry. Four countries were unanimously elected — namely, Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. They are to be joined by the representatives of the OAU and ECOWAS secretariats to form a ministerial Committee.

The Foreign Ministers decided that at the end of their meeting a report should be presented to President Lansana Conte and, subsequently, to His Excellency General Sani Abacha, Chairman of ECOWAS. A presentation was made to the President of Guinea at the conclusion of the meeting. The President endorsed the report in its entirety and was of the view that the illegal regime in Sierra Leone should be removed from office immediately.

At the request of the Foreign Ministers, the President of Guinea, His Excellency General Lansana Conte, gave permission to the Ministers to pay a courtesy call on President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, who is at present in Conakry. The Ministers, as a body, called on President Kabbah, who was presented with the highlights of their discussions. President Kabbah expressed his appreciation to the ECOWAS leaders and to the Ministers for the efforts they were making to find a solution to the Sierra Leonean crisis. He endorsed the conclusions reached by the Ministers and affirmed that though they had not achieved 100 per cent of what he had personally anticipated, they had attained not less than 75 per cent.

The ministerial Committee of Four was entrusted with the task of monitoring developments in Sierra Leone as well as the implementation of the measures adopted, with a view to achieving the above-mentioned objectives. The Committee was given two weeks to return to the Chairman of ECOWAS and brief him on the outcome of their efforts.

Last Saturday, 5 July 1997, the ministerial Committee of Four, including representatives of the OAU and ECOWAS, presented its report to the Chairman of ECOWAS on the outcome of the meeting in Conakry. The Chairman has since endorsed these recommendations and mandated the Committee with the necessary steps outlined in the ECOWAS plan. We were further mandated to report back to him within two weeks on the outcome of our efforts. In this regard, he also directed the Committee to brief the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Security Council on the situation in Sierra Leone in order to obtain support and encouragement.

Yesterday we had a very fruitful meeting with the members of the Council under the Arria formula, and I believe our ECOWAS perspectives on the gravity of the situation and the need for prompt and concerted action by the international community in support of ECOWAS efforts were amply emphasized. Need I mention here that the people of Sierra Leone and the member States of ECOWAS, and indeed the entire continent of Africa, look with great expectation to the outcome of our present meeting and the support of the Council. That support, we hope, should be a clear and unequivocal message to the regime in Sierra Leone that it should comply with the demands of the international community and return power to the legitimate Government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Zimbabwe. I invite his to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Mapuranga (Zimbabwe): I wish to register the delegation' appreciation for this opportunity to participate in these extremely important Security Council deliberations on the extremely grave situation now prevailing in Sierra Leone.

On behalf of His Excellency President R.G. Mugabe, who is the current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), I wish to state categorically that the OAU fully and unreservedly supports the initiative of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Ghana, member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Their mission is as noble as their efforts are praiseworthy.

The OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, meeting in its thirty-third session, at Harare, from 2 to 4 June 1997, "strongly and unequivocally" condemned the *coup d'état* that took place in Sierra Leone on 25 May. That *coup d'état*, mounted and executed on OAU Day — Africa Day — and on the eve of the meeting of the Council of Ministers and the summit of Heads of State and Government, was not only a blatant affront to the continental organization but also a brazen challenge to the will and determination of the OAU, the will and determination not only to resolve violent conflicts now plaguing the continent but to safeguard and defend and nurture democracy in Africa. The *coup d'état* was also a challenge and an act of defiance to the United Nations and indeed to the entire international community.

I wish to state in conclusion that Africa stands solidly and unreservedly behind President Kabbah and the elected Government of Sierra Leone, unreservedly condemns the *coup d'état* and calls upon the Security Council in particular and the international community at large unconditionally to support the efforts of ECOWAS and the OAU in seeking the non-recognition and demise of the military regime in Sierra Leone and in working for the restoration of the democratically elected Government in that country.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.